A Trailer Life Publication
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WDA Gives Away 'Super' Store at Louisville
Special Louisville RV Show Section

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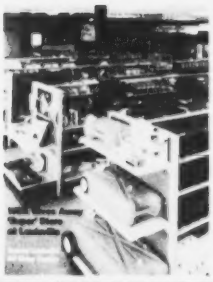
A Trailer Life Publication

RVDealer®

THE RV BUSINESS MAGAZINE
THAT KNOWS THE RV BUYING PUBLIC



ON THE COVER: WDA is going to Louisville this year in a big way, hosting seminars, exhibiting a model parts and accessories store (similar to the one shown on this month's cover) and giving away the entire store — valued at $25,000 — to a lucky dealer. See the full report on page 44, and turn to page 51 for the start of our show section.

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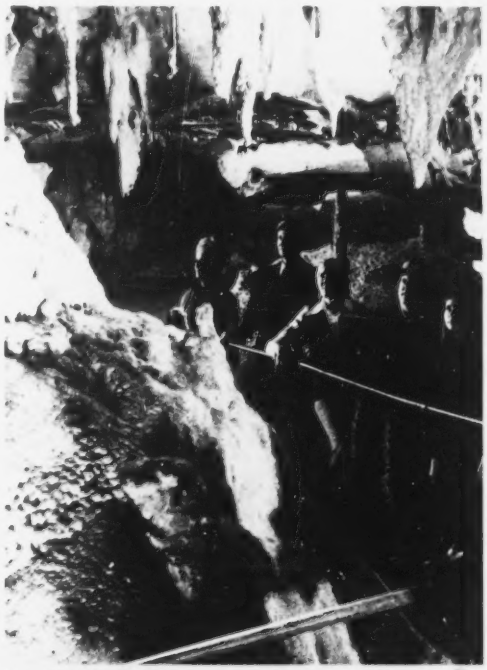

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The Exclusive Monthly
RVDealer Business Report

How's Business?

Sales volume of increase or decrease by individual DAB members	
For month	4 up (21%)
	15 down (79%)
Year to date	2 up (11%)
	17 down (89%)

SALES VOLUME		
For Month	This year $2,712,868	−31%
	Last year $3,923,091	
Year to Date	This year $27,412,346	−36%
	Last year $42,658,524	

TOTAL UNIT SALES		
For Month	This year 346	−21%
	Last year 440	
Year to Date	This year 3,306	−29%
	Last year 4,631	

NEW UNIT SALES		
For Month	This year 200	−27%
	Last year 275	
Year to Date	This year 2,128	−30%
	Last year 3,039	

USED UNIT SALES		
For Month	This year 146	−12%
	Last year 165	
Year to Date	This year 1,178	−26%
	Last year 1,592	

The last "good month" of the year is over and it wasn't very good. Actually, the percentage figures ran a little better than the average for the year, but considering that those figures are rather dismal, it's nothing to shout about. The pattern for September is quite similar to that of August. Both are disappointing after a relatively good July when it appeared that a turnaround had been reached. Apparently a leveling out has not occurred.

Four of the 19 DAB members were up in sales volume for September compared to last year. Fifteen were down. Year to date, 17 (89%) are down from last year. Since 1979 was a very bad year, it's obvious that dealers are not getting fat.

However, many dealers on the advisory board report that their efforts to control operating costs have been so successful that they're making money. Generally, they're making less than before, but what they're doing is acceptable.

Camping trailers are still holding up relatively well. This September's sales were almost identical with those of last year. Year to date, the drop is lower than that of any other RV type. Both new and used show a 16% drop for the year, which is an impressive figure when compared with other RV types.

There shouldn't be anything baffling about the relative success in folding trailer sales. Small cars—small trailers. It follows.

Fifth-wheel sales have picked up a bit during the later part of the summer. Perhaps the snowbirds are preparing for the annual flight south in new rigs. Although the unit figures are relatively small, the percentages are second best for the year among RV types. Down 30% is nothing to crow about, but it's better than the figures in three other RV categories.

Used fifth-wheels apparently sell well. Both for the month and for the year to date, sales figures are up for the DAB. It's the only category with that distinction.

Travel trailer sales are running a steady percentage down from last year. With sales off over a third, dealers of this type aren't too happy. Sales of lightweight units are promising. Unfortunately, they still seem to be more promising than actual. Used sales have been running approximately 10% better than new.

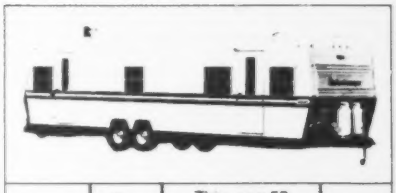
The lineup of '81 model cars must be discouraging for travel trailer dealers. Only one passenger car is rated capable of towing a large trailer. And the tow vehicle problem is going to get worse. The *realities* may not all be clear, but the *indications* are obvious.

Note: Data for this report is provided by RVDealer's own Dealer Advisory Board. This group consists of a wide variety of sizes and types of RV dealerships and represents a cross section of all dealers in the United States.

motorhomes

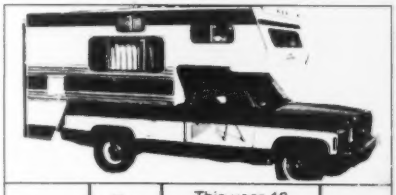
NEW	For Month	This year 43	−45%
		Last year 78	
	Year to Date	This year 335	−43%
		Last year 623	
USED	For Month	This year 54	+4%
		Last year 52	
	Year to Date	This year 331	−15%
		Last year 391	

travel trailers



NEW	For Month	This year 58	−36%
		Last year 90	
	Year to Date	This year 504	−37%
		Last year 804	
USED	For Month	This year 50	−25%
		Last year 67	
	Year to Date	This year 467	−28%
		Last year 649	

truck campers



NEW	For Month	This year 16	−16%
		Last year 19	
	Year to Date	This year 198	−44%
		Last year 352	
USED	For Month	This year 10	−44%
		Last year 18	
	Year to Date	This year 123	−51%
		Last year 253	

RVIA Shipment Figures

The marketing committee of the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association has announced that the total number of recreational vehicles shipped from manufacturers' plants during August 1980 was 15,200, down 26.6% from August of 1979.

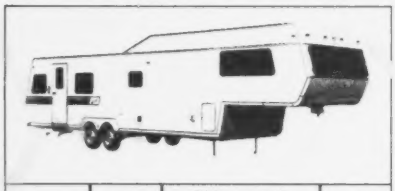
The shipment figures released by the association are contained in a report compiled for the membership by RVIA's marketing committee under the chairmanship of John Agno of the Thetford Corporation.

RV shipments were as follows in August 1980		August 1979	Percent Change	Cumulative 1980	Cumulative 1979	Percent Change
TRAVEL TRAILERS	3,500	4,700	−25.5%	30,300	58,300	−48%
FIFTH-WHEELS	400	1,000	−60%	3,900	11,900	−67.2%
TRUCK CAMPERS	300	900	−66.7%	3,600	11,300	−68.1%
MULTI-USE VEHICLES	7,000	7,800	−10.3%	45,000	81,600	−44.9%
TYPE A: MOTORHOMES	800	1,300	−38.5%	5,900	17,200	−65.7%
TYPE B: VAN CAMPERS	0	200	−100%	1,700	2,900	−41.4%
TYPE C: MINI MOTORHOMES	1,500	2,700	−44.4%	10,200	31,200	−67.3%
FOLDING CAMPING TRAILERS	1,700	2,100	−19.1%	17,100	23,900	−28.5%
TOTALS	15,200	20,700	−26.6%	167,700	238,300	−50.6%

folding trailers

NEW	For Month	This year 70	−1%
		Last year 71	
	Year to Date	This year 1,012	−16%
		Last year 1,176	
USED	For Month	This year 28	+12%
		Last year 25	
	Year to Date	This year 220	−16%
		Last year 263	

fifth wheels



NEW	For Month	This year 13	−24%
		Last year 17	
	Year to Date	This year 59	−30%
		Last year 84	
USED	For Month	This year 4	+33%
		Last year 3	
	Year to Date	This year 37	+3%
		Last year 36	

Truck camper sales picked up in September according to the DAB. A drop of only 16% for the month is encouraging. However, the 44% drop for the year suggests that the market is still strongly off.

Although we do not include sales figures for "toppers" in this report, word from our board is that sales are strong. Hopefully, some of those topper buyers will decide to upgrade in the months to come.

Motorhome sales are still quite low compared with last year's. The downturn to a 45% drop from last September is considerably off from the drop of 29% last month and a disaster when compared with the 10% drop in July. The 43% decline year to date in new unit sales for the DAB is surpassed only by that of truck campers (44%). Obviously, a lot of motorhome dealers are hurting. **rvd**

This is the fourth in a series of exclusive articles for RVDealer in which Dr. Richard Curtin analyzes the significant findings of a study recently completed for the Recreational Vehicle Association on the subject of "The RV Consumer: Current Trends and Future Prospects."

Dr. Curtin is director of surveys of consumer attitudes at the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan; he is regarded as one of the nation's foremost researchers in the area of consumer behavior.

Copies of the complete study are available from RVIA for $2, the cost of postage and handling.

Dr.
Richard T. Curtin

RV owners get their money's worth

For many would-be recreation vehicle owners, a frequent deterrent to their purchase of an RV is the fear they won't use their vehicle enough to get their money's worth. They have visions of their new RV rusting away in their driveway for all but the one week in the summer when they take it on their annual vacation.

That does happen with some RV owners, although mostly because the owners turn out to have less free time on their hands than expected and not because they discover they don't enjoy the lifestyle.

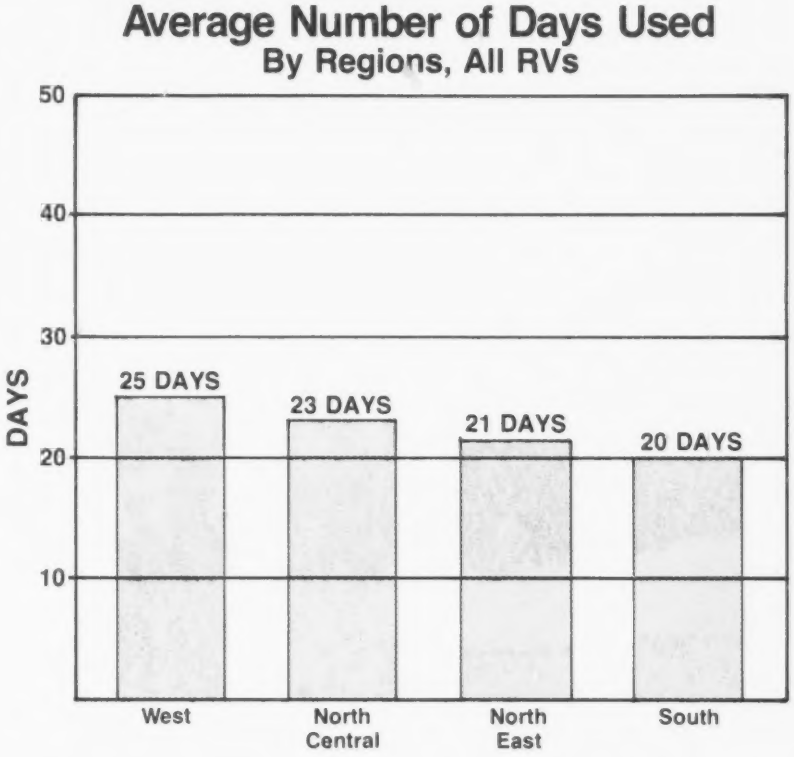
For the most part, however, the fear of non-usage is extremely ill-founded. The majority of America's six million RV families use their units more than just one week per year, and more than a quarter of them — some 1½ million families in total — spend anywhere from a month to four months in their vehicles. The average for all RV owners is 23 days per year.

We learned this by conducting a year-long study of American consumers at the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. In all, we interviewed by phone 7,511 families, of which some 8.3% reported ownership of either a motorhome, travel trailer, van conversion, truck camper or folding camping trailer. Our sample was scientifically selected.

The RV owners who get the most use from their vehicles are those who have motorized units, either motorhomes or vans. Nearly half of all motorhome owners use their vehicles at least one month and as much as four months per year. More than a third of the van owners get the same usage.

Towable owners, on the other hand, don't get nearly the same amount of use from their vehicles. When we asked our towable families how many of them spend at least one month per year using their units (actually, we said 30 to 119 days), less than a quarter of the travel trailer and truck camper owners and only 14% of the folding camping trailer families identified themselves as being in that group.

Travel trailer owners average only 20 days per year, truck camper owners 23 days and folding camping trailer owners just 10 days.



Now take a look at the motorized owners. The average number of days used by van owners is 25, the average for motorhome owners an extremely impressive 36.

What's most surprising about this finding is that much of the survey was made during 1979 when gasoline availability was a critical problem. When we asked about days used, we specifically requested our families to tell us how many days they used their RV in the *previous* 12 months, not how many they normally average. Before the results of our survey came in, it would have been hard to anticipate motorhomes making such a strong showing. If any one type of RV is most affected by a gas availability problem, it would have to be the motorhome. It leaves me to wonder just how high the average-days-used number for motorhomes, or for any RV for that matter, would be if our survey had been taken in 1978.

So why are motorhomes used so much more frequently than other types of recreation vehicles?

Could it be the average usage is inflated by a high percentage of full-timers, meaning owners who live in their units 365 days per year? That's a reasonable theory, but it's really not the case. Whereas half of all motorhome owners spend one to four months in their units, only five percent spend more than four months — so obviously there is not a whole lot of full-timers.

I believe there are two explanations for our finding and both apply not only to motorhomes but to vans as well. In fact, the second explanation applies even more to vans.

The first is the cost of a motorized unit

compared to a towable. Since motorized vehicles generally carry a heavier price tag, their owners try a little harder to make themselves feel they're getting their money's worth. Also, because motorized prices are higher, their buyers normally have higher incomes; with those higher incomes come greater benefits, such as vacation time.

The second explanation is in the versatility of motorized vehicles, particularly vans. Whereas a folding camping trailer, for example, has limited uses, a motorized unit can be used for commuting to and from work, for odd jobs or simply as a substitute station wagon for owners with big families or lots of friends. More than half of all van owners and 20% of all motorhome owners told us they use their vehicles for work. Two-thirds of the van owners and a quarter of the motorhome owners said they use their vehicles for "transporting more people."

These type of uses are not very widespread among the towable owners.

The versatility of the motorized unit, incidentally, could very well prove to be the key to success for the motorized segment of the industry in the years ahead. With the trend toward downsized automobiles, I would expect more and more consumers to be looking to the RV industry for products that can accommodate more than just four passengers. In fact, in my opinion, the multiple uses of motorized RVs should become the industry's primary selling point as the small car trend continues through this decade.

While we were involved in this particular phase of our study on usage patterns, we also took a look at how often RV owners in various demographic groups use their vehicles.

For example, we learned that RV owners 65 and older use their vehicles more often than owners in any other age category — an average of 34 days per year. Owners in the 45 to 54 age bracket are second with an average of 25 days.

RVers in the highest income class ($25,000 or more) average 24 days, more than those in any other income group.

Owners with no children or just one child at home also average 24 days. Those with two or more children use their vehicles less.

And finally, RVers in the West use their vehicles more than RVers in any other part of the country, no doubt due to the double incentive of generally favorable weather and some spectacular recreation areas in that part of the land. Their average is 25 days per year, compared to 23 days by owners in the North Central region, 21 days by Northeasterners and 20 days by Southerners.

One thing I found particularly interesting about Western RV owners is that they use their vehicles for work far more frequently than do other owners. About a quarter of the RV owners in the West told us they use their units for this purpose, while, to offer a comparison, only 11% of the owners in the Northeast said the same.

For whatever purpose, RV families in all parts of the country do indeed get plenty of use from their vehicles — more use, in fact, than we might have expected considering the timing of our survey. I think this is very clear from our results.

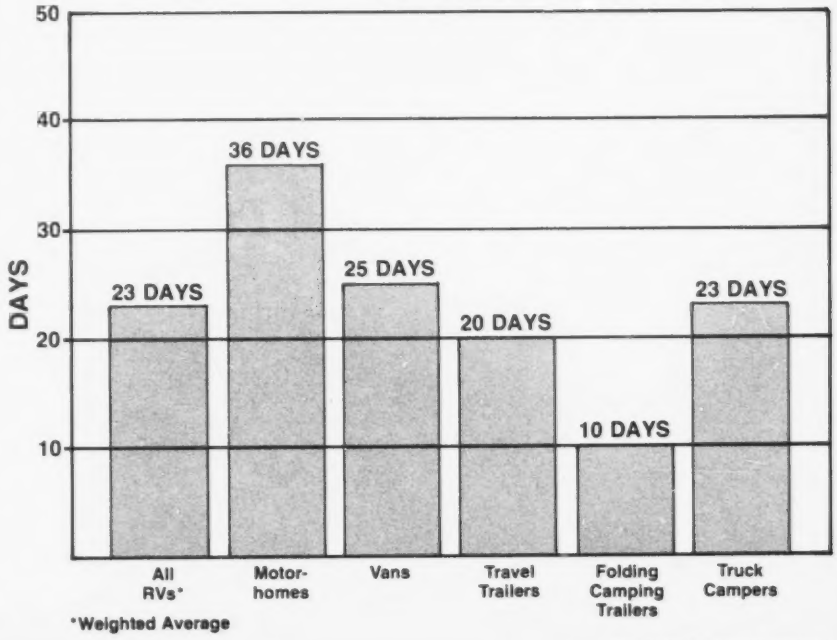
Those not connected with the RV industry, including many government officials who have the power to make laws affecting RV use, don't always realize just how tremendously important a part of their lives RVs are to many Americans.

Consider again: There are more than a million and a half families in this country who spend anywhere from a month to four months of the year with their recreation vehicles. I think that says a lot.

rvd

Next month: A look at replacement demand

Average Number of Days Used
Per Vehicle



*Weighted Average